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Title:

Why do people participate in grassroots-based sustainability initiatives? Diverging predictor patterns for users and volunteers

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Abstract:

Introduction: Grassroots-based sustainability initiatives experiment with alternative ways of consumption and are thus promising agents for fostering pro-environmental behavior change. At the same time, sustainability initiatives depend on high levels of volunteering and collective action. The present contribution aims for a better understanding of why people participate in sustainability initiatives, and whether such engagement is an expression of a broader sustainable lifestyle.

Methods: We tested the predictive importance of different motivational factors derived from grassroots innovation research, the theory of planned behavior, and theories on collective action, using data from a cross-sectional factorial survey among members of different sustainability initiatives in Switzerland (N=180).

Results: Our results revealed diverging predictor patterns for different degrees of involvement. The intention to use initiatives' services and offers was best predicted by favorable attitudes and perceived behavior control, whereas the intention to volunteer was primarily based on strong social identity and high participative efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, our results revealed that participation in sustainability initiatives concurs with several private-sphere pro-environmental behaviors.

Discussion: We conclude from our results that the discrepancy in motivational factors between users and volunteers might pose a challenge to the success of sustainability initiatives and thus deserves greater attention in future research.